GRAVEYARD
RISING
STORIES FROM
THE ATTIC

Graveyard Rising

A Short Scary Story

By Stories From The Attic

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GRAVEYARD RISING: A SHORT SCARY STORY

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Graveyard Rising: A Short Scary Story

Tyler Street looked as though it hadn't changed a bit since the last time Byron had been there. Same sidewalk cafe. Same trendy woman's clothing store across the street. Same classy jazz club next door to that. It had been a year since he'd been there, and everything was perfectly in place.

Stepping past the jazz club and clothing store, he heard a high-pitched whimper in the background, rising above the traffic's din. It sounded wounded, almost angry. Like a dying goose.

Checking the faces of other pedestrians, he wonders why nobody else seemed to notice the sound. They all kept walking, faces casual. Nobody was curious about that tortured wail.

Byron shrugged it off, figuring he was just imagining it. Maybe he was distracted by the grim mission that lay ahead of him.

He took a seat at the sidewalk cafe, checking the time and rehearsing words in his head he'd already repeated more times than he cared to recall.

It's not you. It's me. I just don't think I'm prepared to provide everything a strong, dynamic young woman like yourself deserves. And let's be clear about one thing: You are the best. And you deserve the best. In fact, you deserve better than me. Much, much better than me...

The waiter stepped up with a forced grin, a pad of paper and pencil ready. "Hello, my name is — "

"Marco!" Bryon called. "Good to see you again."

Marco tilted his head, eyes narrow. "Yeah... um, Byron, right? Remind me where I know you from."

"I'm a regular, dude. Well, semi-regular. I'm the guy who was here a year ago with a pretty redhead. Then a month before that with a hot blonde. In fact, I think I made a total of six trips here in the last two years. And always with the same purpose in mind."

"Tell me about it," Marco said. "Not to brag, but this is a surprisingly good place to score some points with your lady. Am I right?"

"Well... not exactly. I mean, I'm sure it can serve that purpose, but for me, it always serves another purpose."

"What's that?"

Byron leaned in closer, kept his voice low. "Let's put it this way: I call this place the girlfriend graveyard."

"Huh?"

"You see, the way I figure it, if you're going to dump a girl, you want to take her someplace classy and quiet. That way, she won't get loud and

dramatic on you."

"Good move, dude."

"And on top of that, you got those cool places across the street. Clothing store where she can distract herself by shopping for new shoes or a skirt or whatever girls buy in there. And cool little jazz club where she can listen to some soothing music to calm herself down too."

"I should try it myself someday."

"I'm telling you, works every time!" Byron said. "Although I did have this close call once with Molly when she — "

He stopped himself before Emily stepped around the corner, all grins and long, black hair. "Hey, honey!"

After a discreet nod to the waiter, Bryon leaned back in his chair, pasting a phony smile on his face, and preparing his speech as his girlfriend eased into her seat.

His date ordered a green tea and avocado salad. He went with a bacon cheeseburger. As Marco retreated from the table, Byron mouthed the words 'wish me luck' while Emily couldn't see him. The waiter replied with a wink, then left.

"Hey there, pretty lady. That smile for me?"

"Always. So... what did you have planned? You told me it was really urgent we get together today. I figured you must have a surprise for me. Was I right?"

Byron felt a tug from his conscience. He frowned, then took her by the hand. "Here's the thing, Emily..."

The smile melted from her face as the words came out, assaulting her one-by-one. She looked away, face tightening, eyes getting red and wet. But she didn't cry. This was, after all, a quiet and classy cafe. Sobbing in a place like this would just seem... in bad taste.

"I'm sorry," he said, her tiny hand now shaking, but still clinging to his. "Are you going to be okay?"

Emily looked up at him, swallowing hard. For a split second, her eyes found the clothing store across the street. He could see her spirits lift a little. The smile was on its way back. "Yeah. I think so."

Marco approached with their meals, gently placing the plates on the table before stepping back. He didn't have to wonder what the awkward silence was about.

Emily looked down at her plate, her gaze empty. “You know... I don’t think I have much of an appetite anymore. I’m sorry.” She raced off to the clothing store without another word.

As he stared at the food, it occurred to Byron that he should have saved the speech until after they’d eaten. Now he has left a green tea and avocado salad he didn’t want to eat and had already ordered. It was a rookie mistake. He chalked it up to his being a little rusty. It had, after all, been a whole year since he’d sent somebody to the girlfriend’s graveyard.

He took one more glance at Emily as she trudged inside the store. It was almost enough to make him sad. But not quite.

He turned back and saw Marco approach, offering a discreet fist bump. “Mission accomplished, huh?” the waiter asked.

“Kind of,” Byron said, nodding toward the untouched salad and tea.

“Sorry. No returns on food once it’s been ordered.”

“No worries. I am curious about something though.”

“What’s that?”

“That weird noise coming from across the street. That scream. That hasn’t hurt business or anything, has it? You’d think something that loud would — “

Marco’s face was twisted. “What noise?”

Byron laughed. This had to be a joke. “Seriously, I can’t be the only one who hears that can I?”

Marco slowly backed away as if unsure of his customer’s sanity. No more bro bonding. He was scared now. “You want a doggie bag for that?” He asked, gaze aimed at the table like he was afraid to make eye contact.

***

At home, Byron could still hear the wail. It was quieter now, less urgent, but it was still there. And it wasn’t going anywhere.

He figured it would fade away in time, just disappear into the backdrop of life. But he was wrong. Playing his music at top volume did nothing to mask it. The wail only blended in with it, weaving its horror in and out of the song’s melody like a haunting background vocalist.

Exercise also didn’t help, or Netflix or late-night phone calls.

Once bedtime arrived, he was a mess, sweating, shaking, gobbling down sleeping pill after sleeping pill in an effort to escape. After too many

minutes of pacing and counting sheep, he managed somehow to get to sleep.

But the wail was right there waiting for him.

It knifed through his dream world, reminding him that no matter how pleasant the landscape, he was still who he was. He was still the guy with a history of abandoning girlfriend after girlfriend like outgrown shoes. And he would have to pay for his sins.

He sprang out of bed, face drenched with sweat. By now, the voice wasn't just there. It was recognizable. This voice belonged to Sarah.

Sarah was an adorable redhead who liked yoga and weird new age-y stuff Byron never understood or cared about. She was a lovable oddball at first, with her waist-length hair and piece sign-tattooed belly. She read him his tarot cards at breakfast and conducted seances at night that seemed so funny and cute, especially when she did them naked.

But in time, the oddball became less lovable. They argued over stupid things like whether his furniture violated the room's feng shui or his choice to eat meat. Within a month of their meeting, it was time for Sarah to be sent to the Girlfriend Graveyard.

Once the recognition of the voice hit him, it grew louder, angrier, as if responding to his awareness. "I love you!" It seemed to scream, piercing his eardrum like a stiletto.

This was enough to send him to his feet, pacing through his room, frantic.

But then something else occurred to him. She wasn't saying, love. She was saying *Loved*. Past tense. That creeped him out, even more, raised the hair on his arms.

Nothing to do but bury his head under the pillow, screaming to drown it out. But that only turned the voice into laughter, mocking him for thinking he could smother it out of existence.

He lifted his head and thought about something she'd said to him. She'd said something about how recently departed souls who were in torment often made loud noises in the night, torturing those who sent them to the grave.

Byron knew this made no sense. He didn't believe any of it. This had to be his own imagination concocting the voice. After all, nobody heard but him. And besides, Sarah was alive and well, wasn't she?

He wasn't so sure. Keeping in touch with past girlfriends was something he'd always promise to do, but never did. There was no point. Once he was done with them, he'd gotten everything he needed. Things could only get messy from there anyway. Better to make a clean break. So, he had no idea if Sarah was still around. Only one way to find out.

Springing to the other side of the bedroom, he dug into the pants pocket of last night's jeans. With shaky hands, he scooped out the cell phone, dialed, and waited, his breath heavy and body trembling.

It took five rings to get an answer. "Yeah?" said the voice, half-asleep, drained. But it was Sarah.

Byron released a sigh that nearly hurt his lungs. "Thank God."

After a pause, she said, "Byron? What the hell are you doing calling me at two in the morning?"

"Long story. We'll talk later," he said. "I just... needed to know you were still alive."

"What?"

"Like I said, long story. But... um, you are still alive, right? I'm not talking to a ghost or something, am I?"

Her voice woke up with a high-pitched cackle. "No, Byron. I'm still around despite your best efforts to destroy me."

He forced a laugh. "Yeah, I guess I wasn't the best boyfriend. Well, anyway, I'll let you get back to sleep now and — "

"Yes, you could say that. You weren't the best boyfriend. In fact, I've never had a boyfriend who lied about his car, his dog, his job. Then on top of that, you dumped me two days after my cat died with some stupid line about how I didn't deserve you."

"Well... I was kind of right, wasn't I?"

"Byron, you were wrong so much, you don't even know how it felt to be right. But yeah, I didn't deserve you. Nobody does."

"Okay, well, I'll let you do now — "

"No, no, you're not getting rid of me that easy! Not like the first time."

"Look, I understand you're a little upset, but I just called to make sure you were still alive."

Another laugh. "Yes, I am. You may have crushed my soul. But you didn't destroy my body." She hung up.

Byron sat there with the phone in his hand, waiting for the wail to go away. But it only got louder, carving deep inside his skull until his temples

throbbed. This didn't make sense. If Sarah were still alive, there was no way her soul could be in torment.

Then he remembered her words. *You may have crushed my soul....*

Her soul was dead. It had somehow left her body after being dumped. And he needed to confront it or there would never be peace.

He dialed again.

Sarah answered with a groan. "What is it this time?"

"How do you stop a soul from screaming for you?"

"Oh, my God! A soul is screaming for you?"

He could hear her voice increase in urgency and her posture stiffen over the phone. "Yeah, it sounds like it's in pain. Like Awwwwwww!" He imitated the soprano voice the best his baritone would allow.

Sarah gasped, then said nothing for a while.

"Come on, what should I do?"

Another pause. She returned, voice sterner now, almost scared. "This is serious. And you need to get serious about the way you treat it." She took a deep breath, carefully considering her words. "You need to take something of the deceased to the graveyard. And you need to do this now."

Byron thought for a while, wondering if it was a good idea to mention if 'the deceased' wasn't deceased and that the 'deceased' was her. He decided against it. That would only complicate things and give her reason to get emotional. Right now, he needed solutions, not more drama. "Hold on a second." He rifled through the closet, hoping to find something she'd left behind.

"Byron, whatever it is you're doing, there's no time for it!"

Digging through the giant pile of clothes on his closet floor, he lifted everything he found, one item at a time. All his. Until he reached a pair of panties. "Did you leave a pair of red silk panties in my house?"

"This is no time for your perverted talk! You have to get to that graveyard fast!"

"Look, I just need to know because — "

"And why are you still holding on to my panties a year after we split up anyway?"

Byron didn't answer. He pumped a triumphant fist in the air and scrambled around for clothes. After clumsily throwing himself into a pair of tattered jeans and a mustard-stained Forty-Niners jersey, he raced out of his

home, the phone still cupped to his ear, red silk panties stuffed into his pocket.

Once in his car, he rejoined the conversation as the ignition roared to life. “I’m going to need you to talk me through this, so please stay on the line.”

No reply.

“You still there?”

Through gritted teeth, Sarah grunted, “I swear to God, if I didn’t think your life was in danger right now, I’d tell you to go straight to hell.”

“Thank you.”

“Just shut up and listen carefully. Once you get to the graveyard, you’re going to present the item and call the name of the deceased until they are with you.”

“How will I know when they’re with me?”

“Take my word for it. You’ll know.”

“Then after that?”

She took a deep breath, said, “Well... here’s the thing...” sounding like a parent about to tell their kid the truth about Santa Clause.

“Yeah?”

“We’ll cross that bridge when we come to it. It’s not clear you’re going to survive beyond that.”

“Are you telling me to do something dangerous?”

“Yes,” Sarah said. “Dangerous and necessary.”

The rest of the drive took place in uneasy silence. A stroll down memory lane would have only made things more awkward and intensified Sarah’s rage. So, Byron drove down the street, eyes alertly wide, hands so sweaty it was a struggle to hold on to the steering wheel, breath coming out in panicked chops.

He reached the graveyard about ten minutes faster than he would have if he’d obeyed the speed limit, then screeched to a halt in front of the clothing store, panties poised in his hand like a pistol.

Emerging from his car, one hand holding the phone to his ear, the other wielding the panties, he shut the door with his hip — quietly as if afraid to wake a sleeping lioness.

It was a small boutique, no more than fifteen feet wide. Two mannequins decorated the front window, the frames covered by long

multicolored floral print dresses. Everything behind that was obscured by a bright pink theatrical curtain.

He inched forward and spoke into the phone, voice just above a whisper. “Okay, I’m here. What was the first thing to do again?”

“Call the spirit up. You remember the name, don’t you?”

“Of course.” Pressing the speaker into his shoulder, he called Sarah’s name, then waited.

Nothing.

He tried again, a little louder. Once again, nothing. The wail was still there, as strong and soaring as ever, but nothing else.

He swallowed hard and tried again, this time screaming “Sarah!” until his lungs ached. Bad move.

The first thing that snagged Byron’s attention was the shaking of the mannequins. Their dresses flapped as if under the sway of a gusty wind. Seconds later, they tumbled to the floor. Then the glass shattered, forming a hole that sucked him inside, lifting him, tugging him, then tossing his lifeless body to the floor.

The wail inside was nearly deafening. With his body wrapped in the curtain, he staggered to his feet, missing a step, and crashing into a wall. After hitting the floor a second time, he lay there, shards of glass in his hair and mouth, arms full of Sarah’s panties and the cell phone.

He struggled to bring the receiver to the mouth, then spoke, breathless, frantic. “Okay... now what?”

No answer. He realized Sarah couldn’t hear him with the noise in the background. He repeated the question, screaming this time.

She screamed her answer. “Wherever you are, get out of there! Now!”

“But — “

“No buts! Get out! While you can!”

He reached for a while, and when he didn’t find one, he slipped down, planting his face on the hardwood floor.

After more struggling, he found his feet, then tried to yank the curtain away. It took minutes but he got himself free, pulling away and reaching toward freedom. The open window was three maybe four feet away...

But he couldn’t get there.

The sucking force that carried him inside hauled his body away from the window. He felt his skin flapping hard, eyes forced shut. It was like one

of those movie scenes of a fighter pilot dragged down by the persistent forces of gravity.

After a violently hard yank, Byron was crushed against the rear wall, leaving him gasping for air and nursing his ribcage as he tried to scrape himself off the floor.

But once again, he couldn't move. Instead, he saw an army of well-dressed mannequins inching toward him, their movements robotic and slow, but menacing just the same.

Meanwhile, the wail had intensified further. It was now no longer a single wail, but a chorus of them, six voices screeching together, each pitch in a different key and following a different rhythm. And Byron knew exactly who they were.

Sarah was the leader. The high-pitched siren of her crushed soul had started things. But when he listened carefully, Byron could also hear Emily, Pam, Molly, and few others whose names he'd forgotten.

The mannequins rearranged themselves and circled around him, slowly closing in. The screeches were deafening now, craving into his ear canal, and bringing a throb back to his temples. He could feel his legs buckle as the ground came up to meet him.

He needed something, anything. A knife, a gun. Something he could use to defend himself or at least distract his tormentors long enough for him to escape.

Giving the floor before him a scan, he saw nothing useful. A wooden clothes hanger was the only thing in reach, while his cell phone and a ball of string lay just out of his grasp.

He took a blow to his spine, pressing him further to the floor, face cold against the hardwood. Then came the sharp pokes from fingers and thumbs. The army of mannequins seemed determined to cut him open — even if their blunt digits couldn't do the job.

This didn't stop them from trying. They jabbed, clipped, curled into his muscle, not penetrating flesh, but it was only a matter of time.

Under the register, he spotted something shiny and long. A possible weapon. With no other options, he reached for it, clumsily pulled it back, and swung wildly, missing once, then twice.

But the mannequins stopped as if he'd not only hit them but registers a deadly blow. No more movement.

Byron's breath returned as he gawked upward, finding a collection of frozen faces, as motionless as their dull eyes were lifeless.

Without warning, one of them came down on him, clanking hard against the back of his head. He braced himself for another onslaught, but it never came. This was just a mannequin toppling on the slippery floor. It lay on top of him, not moving.

The wails had stopped too. His ears kept ringing and the chorus of squeals continued to echo, but the original sources had died. He was free.

Looking back, he spotted the origin of his freedom. When yanking the steel rod away, he'd accidentally pulled a power source from the socket.

The thought sent a laugh through him. It seemed an appropriate end to the weirdest experience of his life.

His first impulse was to climb to his feet, but before getting there, another eerie sound shrieked to life — this one static-laden and faint. With wide eyes, he swept the store's landscape, seeing nothing out of the ordinary. There was the mess he found himself in the middle of, his attackers, the balled-up curtain, his cell phone.

That was it! The screams were coming from his cell phone.

Byron reached forward and scooped his cell up, bringing it as close to his ear as he could without risking pain. "Sarah?"

She was laughing now, lacing throaty howls between each scream. "Hello, Byron," she said. "I figured some things out in the last few minutes."

"What's that, Sarah?" he said, his voice deeper now, cocky. And why not? The trauma was over. Nothing more to fear.

"You didn't tell me *my* soul was the one in torment."

Bryon heaved himself off the floor and dusted off. "Well, doesn't matter now anyway, does it?"

"I'm afraid it does."

He started for the door now. "What are you talking about? It's all over now."

"Wrong!" she screamed. "Unleash hell!"

In perfect synch with Sarah's command, his body was sucked back against the wall, crashing hard against it, and landing under the pile of mannequins.

The wooden arms remained lifeless, but an odd sound emerged. Crackles.

As they grew louder and louder, Byron breathlessly fought against the tug while scanning his surroundings. What the hell was making that sound?

A glance at the mannequins answered the question. They were on fire and he was underneath him.

Although still lifeless, they now seemed to weigh a ton. Fighting the gravitation pull was a battle he couldn't win. He looked around, finding fire everything. The curtains were aflame along with the wooden hangers and with one powerful *whoosh!* the floor.

Flames shot from below, inches high at first, then growing to feet in seconds.

He couldn't lift himself from the floor, but he could shift from place to place, keeping the intense heat from burning him too badly. With much effort, he reached to the counter at his side, aiming to find the top.

With a grunt, he got there, then wormed himself upright until a safe spot atop it was just one tug away.

But he slipped, landing hard and bringing the hardwood floor to his knees and elbows. His body ached and felt drained, nothing left in his tank.

He screamed into his cell phone. "Sarah, please! Whatever you want from me, you got it!"

"You don't understand!" she replied. It's too late! What I wanted from you can never ever be gained."

"Why?" he called.

No answer.

He repeated the question until his voice was dry and empty. "I was wrong! I admit it! I just wanted your body! Nothing else! I didn't care anything about you as a person and I was wrong!"

The flames went out. So did the suction. Within seconds, the embers became ash. The only sound now was the smoke flickering to its death.

"What did you say?" she demanded.

"What just happened here?"

"I... I don't know. I heard you say something weird. Or weird for you, at least."

"What was that?"

"You told me... the truth. You were open, honest, vulnerable. You unburdened your soul. That must have done it."

Bryon slowly found his feet, moving slowly as if testing the room's gravity, making sure he could move freely. He could.

But this time, he didn't trust his surroundings right away. He stepped through the hole in the window and walked free, bringing his cell phone back to his ear.

Sarah was still talking, going on and on, just like she used to. Listening to her, he shook his head. Just like the old days. Here she goes again, droning on forever with all her new age-y crap. "I think what happened here is kind of like the Catholic doctrine of confession. It's as if bearing your soul has an immediate effect that saves you from past..."

He clicked the conversation dead, then tucked his cell phone away as he moved on, ignoring the crowd of gawkers who had gathered. As a fire engine's siren closed in from the distance, he got into his car and drove home, already imagining the way the story would get re-told for his buddies.

***

After getting home, Byron could barely drag his exhausted body to the mattress before dropping asleep. He lay there, grin still alive on his face as the day's events flashed past him like a scene in a horror movie.

His dreams were pleasant. And why not? The nightmare was over. Evil had been vanquished. The crushed soul of Sarah was far behind in his rear-view mirror, a distant memory as their brief union had been.

He lay there face down, ensconced in the delights of pretty maidens, and endless stretch of grass and cloudless skies as far he could see.

But the utopia was interrupted by the knock at his door. He sprang up from the bed, eyes wide. What the hell could be happening now?

After trudging to the door and giving his peephole a cautious check, he saw a face he didn't recognize. A pretty one. Blonde delicate and soft smiling. It was as if his dream had reached beyond itself and landed in real life. He couldn't unlock and open the door fast enough.

"Hi there," the woman said, even prettier than promised by the preview. But her uniform puzzled him. Navy blue with yellow horizontal stripes. "I'm Miriam."

"Hey, Miriam," he crooned, leaned against the door frame. With danger averted, he was ready to get back into the game. And Miriam seemed to be just the player he needed. "What can I do for you?"

"Well, you can begin by coming down to the station."

“Huh?”

“I’m Captain Miriam Rogers with the San Francisco fire department. According to several witnesses, you were seen leaving a fire scene. We’ve got some questions for you.”

He struggled for the words. “Well... um... “

“Maybe I shouldn’t have worded that as a question. If you refuse, the police department will have a few questions for you. And you’ll probably be answering them in handcuffs.”

Without another word, he followed the officer to her car. After getting in the passenger seat, he tried to settle his nerves by assuring himself that he’d done nothing wrong — at least nothing anybody could prove. Sure, technically, he’d ‘broken’ into the store and he was indeed there when a fire broke out, but none of this was witnessed by anybody. Was it?

Maybe it was.

For the time being, Byron had some explaining to do. His mind reeled in search of answers.

“You seem a little uneasy, Byron. Anything on your mind?”

His mind was flooded with a million troubling thoughts. But the first was his name. He turned to her panicked. “What did you call me?”

“Byron,” she said, her polite smile fading and quickly replaced by a seductive one. “That’s your name, isn’t it?”

“Yeah, but I never told you that.”

“Don’t worry. I’ve been in touch with friends who’ve filled me in.”

He had no idea what that could have meant. “Listen, are you sure I have to do this?”

“You don’t mind answering a few questions, do you?”

“To be honest, there are other things I’d rather be doing right now?”

“Such as?”

They were at a stoplight. Miriam turned, face still in seduction mode, lips pouty as if awaiting a kiss.

But Byron had learned his lesson. He figured he now understood the way to avoid future horror. Unburdening his guilty conscience. “Look... to be totally honest with you. I’ve been a bad guy. I’ve lied to women; I’ve led them on. I’ve treated them badly. And what I’d rather be doing right now is something with you that is... let’s just say, unrelated to the fire.”

“That’s all I needed to hear,” she said. The captain spun to a nearby hotel and parked in the rear. The two of them raced inside and she swung

the door open.

Inside, there was a bevy of gorgeous women, scantily clad and ready for him. But just when things couldn't have possibly gotten better. Flames shot through the floor. Within seconds, the room was ablaze. He tried to turn back but it was too late.

"But... I was honest!" he yelled. "I don't belong here!"

The replay was laughter. And soon they were gnawing at him, ripping him to ribbons as he begged for mercy, all the while knowing it was too late. He was right where belonged.

THE END